Maitreya and the Last Prophet: A Philological, Anthropological, and Perennial Study of the Archetype of the World's Redeemer

By Jayanantaka

Introduction: The Buddha and the Prophet as Transcendental Archetypes

Across the history of human spirituality, almost every civilization has known figures of enlightenment who appear in times of moral decay.
In Buddhism, this figure is the *Bodhisattva* or *future Buddha*; in Islam, it is the *Prophet* (*Rasūl*).

From the lens of **anthropology of religion**, both serve the same spiritual and social function: mediators between the human and the divine realms.
Through the perspective of **sociology of language**, the terms *Buddha* and *Prophet* are not opposing categories, but linguistic expressions for a shared spiritual function — the enlightened one who guides humanity toward truth and liberation.

In **post-structuralist** terms, religious meaning is constructed through language and context. Thus, *Maitreya* in Buddhism and *Muḥammad* ﷺ in Islam can be read as two cultural signifiers pointing toward one universal reality: *the descent of divine wisdom and compassion into human history.*

The Qur'an affirms this principle of universality in revelation:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانِ قَوْمِهِ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمْ
"We sent not a Messenger except [speaking] in the language of his people, that he might make [the Message] clear to them."
— (Qur'an, Ibrāhīm [14]:4)

Hence, the difference between "Buddha" and "Prophet" is linguistic, not metaphysical. *Maitreya* and *Muḥammad* ﷺ stand as two reflections of one transcendent light — *the Divine Word manifest in history.*

Philological Study: The Chronology and Textual Variations of Maitreya

The concept of *Maitreya* developed across Buddhist history. The following sources trace the evolution of the Maitreyan prophecy:

Period	Text	Language	Central Narrative
3rd century BCE	*Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta* (Dīgha Nikāya 26)	Pāli	Prediction of a future Buddha named Metteyya who will appear after the Dharma disappears.
2nd–3rd century CE	*Anāgatavaṃsa*	Pāli	Apocalyptic poem describing the moral degeneration of the world and the future appearance of Metteyya.
4th–5th century CE	*Maitreyavyākaraṇa Sūtra*	Sanskrit	Celestial prophecy describing Maitreya in Tusita Heaven, awaiting his descent.

Period	Text	Language	Central Narrative
6th–7th century CE	*Lalitavistara Sūtra* & Mahāyāna texts	Sanskrit	Maitreya as the embodiment of universal compassion and transcendent wisdom.

Primary Texts and Philological Analysis

1. Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta (Dīgha Nikāya 26)

"Anāgate addhāne, Metteyyo nāma bhagavā loke uppajjissati, arahaṃ sammā-sambuddho, vijjā-caraṇa-sampanno, sugato, lokavidū, anuttaro purisa-damma-sārathi, satthā deva-manussānaṃ, buddho bhagavā."
"In the time to come, there shall arise in the world a Blessed One named Metteyya, an Arahant, a Fully Enlightened One, endowed with wisdom and conduct, the Sublime One, the Knower of the worlds, the incomparable leader of men to be tamed, the Teacher of gods and men, a Buddha, a Blessed One."

Here, *Metteyya* (Skt. *Maitreya*) is described as the *Bhagavā* — the Blessed One. The name derives from *maitrī / mettā*, "loving-kindness," establishing compassion as the central quality of the coming Buddha.

---

2. Anāgatavaṃsa

"Imasmiṃ loke uppajjissati Metteyyo nāma Mahākaruṇiko bhagavā, so sabbesaṃ hitāya sukhāya dhammaṃ desessati."
"In this world there will arise a Blessed One named Metteyya, the Greatly Compassionate, who will teach the Dhamma for the welfare and happiness of all beings."

This Pāli text situates Maitreya's appearance within a moral decline, emphasizing restoration through compassion and wisdom rather than conquest or divine wrath.

---

3. Maitreyavyākaraṇa Sūtra

"Śākyamuner anantaram Maitreyasya bhaviṣyati samyaksaṃbuddhatā, dharmarājā lokanāyakaḥ."
"After Śākyamuni, Maitreya shall attain perfect enlightenment — the King of Dharma, the World-Leader."

The Sūtra reveals continuity — enlightenment does not end with one Buddha. Maitreya will reawaken the Dharma, echoing the Qur'anic principle of recurring revelation throughout history.

The Characteristics and Mission of Maitreya

Aspect	Description	Symbolic Meaning
Etymology	From *maitrī* / *mettā* ("loving-kindness")	The embodiment of universal love

Aspect	Description	Symbolic Meaning
Spiritual Status	Bodhisattva in Tusita Heaven	Transcendent awareness awaiting descent
Mission	To restore the Dharma and relieve suffering	Spiritual and moral regeneration
Moral Traits	*Mahākaruṇiko* (Greatly Compassionate), *Sammā-sambuddho* (Perfectly Enlightened)	Love as cosmic power
Method	Non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), teaching through truth and compassion	Transformation through wisdom
Symbols	Lotus flower, water vase, radiant smile	Purity, generosity, illumination
Cosmic Timing	Appears when the Dharma has vanished	Renewal of cosmic order (Dharma)

Symbolic Comparison: Maitreya and the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ

Dimension	Maitreya (Buddhism)	Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ (Islam)	Perennial Meaning
Historical context	Dharma forgotten	Age of moral darkness (*Jāhiliyyah*)	Spiritual crisis of humanity
Primary quality	*Mettā* and *Karuṇā* (love and compassion)	*Raḥmah* and *Ḥilm* (mercy and gentleness)	Love as divine nature
Teaching	Renewal of Dharma	Revelation of the Qur'an	Restoration of divine truth
Goal	Universal enlightenment	Consciousness of Divine Unity (Tawḥīd)	Awakening to the One Reality
Method	Non-violence, teaching	Wisdom and mercy	Inner transformation, not conquest
Symbol	Lotus and light	Light of revelation	Illumination of the heart

---

Love and the Word as Transformative Power

Maitreya's power is not a sword but the **Word** — the compassionate teaching that dissolves ignorance.

"Mettāya cetovimutti sabbā disā pharitvā viharati."
"He dwells pervading all directions with a heart of loving-kindness." — (Itivuttaka 27)

Similarly, the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ was commanded:

ادْعُ إِلَىٰ سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحِكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ
"Invite [all] to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching."
— (Qur'an, An-Naḥl [16]:125)

Both the Buddha-to-come and the Prophet teach that **the true weapon of transformation is speech imbued with love** — compassion as an act of truth.

Perennial Theology: The One Reality in Buddhism and Islam

Buddhist Sources

"Atthi, bhikkhave, ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhataṃ."
"There is, monks, an unborn, unmade, unconditioned." — (Udāna 8.3)

"Anantam sabbato pabhaṃ."
"The Infinite, radiant in all directions." — (Dīgha Nikāya II.157)

"Ekam hi saccam, na dutīyam atthi."
"Truth is one; there is no second." — (Dhammapada 278)

These texts affirm the presence of an ultimate, uncreated, limitless reality — *Paramattha Sacca* — the Buddhist equivalent of the Divine Absolute.

Islamic Sources

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ۝ اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ ۝ لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ۝ وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ
"Say: He is Allah, the One. Allah, the Eternal Refuge. He neither begets nor is born, and there is none comparable to Him."
— (Qur'an, Al-Ikhlāṣ [112]:1–4)

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ مَثَلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَوٰةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ ۖ الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ ۖ الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ يُوقَدُ مِن شَجَرَةٍ مُّبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَّا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ ۚ يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ ۚ نُّورٌ عَلَىٰ نُورٍ ۗ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ ۚ وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ
— (Qur'an, An-Nūr [24]:35)

Both traditions converge on the same metaphysical truth: the ultimate, self-luminous Reality that transcends all dualities — called *Dharmakāya* in Buddhism and *Allah al-Nūr* in Islam.

Anthropological and Post-Structural Reflections

From an **anthropological perspective**, the prophecy of Maitreya reflects humanity's collective yearning for renewal.
Every civilization constructs an image of the redeemer who restores moral order — the "archetype of hope."

From a **post-structural** angle, "Maitreya" and "Muḥammad" are linguistic signs referring to the same archetypal function — the messenger who mediates between the human and the divine.
The diversity of religious languages, therefore, reveals not contradiction but complementarity in the articulation of truth.

Conclusion

Maitreya and *Muḥammad* ﷺ stand as two historical manifestations of a single universal principle: the descent of divine compassion and wisdom to awaken humanity from the sleep of ignorance.

"Ekam hi saccam, na dutīyam atthi." — "Truth is one; there is no second."

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ — *"Say: He is Allah, the One."*

The Dhamma of Maitreya and the Revelation of Muḥammad both affirm one Reality — the Eternal, the Uncreated, the Light of all worlds.
Love (*mettā, raḥmah*) and Truth (*sacca, ḥaqq*) are the twin forces of that Reality, illuminating the path for all who seek the unity of the sacred.

References (APA 7th Edition)

Primary Buddhist Sources
Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta. (1903). *Dīgha Nikāya* (Vol. 26). London: Pali Text Society.
Anāgatavaṃsa. (1885). In R. Morris (Ed.), *Journal of the Pali Text Society* (Vol. 4).
Lamotte, É. (1958). *Maitreyavyākaraṇa Sūtra*. In *Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien*. Louvain: Institut Orientaliste.
Udāna. (1915). Pali Text Society Edition.
Dhammapada. (1910). Pali Text Society Edition.
Itivuttaka. (1911). Pali Text Society Edition.
Lalitavistara Sūtra. (1902). Ed. S. Lefmann. Berlin: Imprimerie Nationale.
Mahāvastu. (1890–1901). Ed. É. Senart. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale.

Secondary and Comparative Works
Coomaraswamy, A. K. (1943). *Hinduism and Buddhism.* Princeton University Press.
Conze, E. (1967). *Buddhist Thought in India.* London: Allen & Unwin.
Harvey, P. (2013). *An Introduction to Buddhism.* Cambridge University Press.
Warder, A. K. (2000). *Indian Buddhism.* Motilal Banarsidass.
Rahula, W. (1974). *What the Buddha Taught.* Grove Press.
Lamotte, É. (1988). *History of Indian Buddhism.* Louvain: Institut Orientaliste.
Gombrich, R. (2009). *What the Buddha Thought.* Equinox.
Strong, J. S. (1997). *The Experience of Buddhism.* Wadsworth.

Islamic and Perennial Sources
The Qur'an al-Karīm. (Madinah Edition).
Al-Ṭabarī, M. (1984). *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān.* Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif.
Al-Rāzī, F. (1981). *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr.* Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī.
Ibn Kathīr, I. (1998). *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm.* Riyadh: Dār Ṭayyibah.
Schuon, F. (1984). *The Transcendent Unity of Religions.* Quest Books.
Nasr, S. H. (1993). *Knowledge and the Sacred.* SUNY Press.
Nasr, S. H. (2002). *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity.* HarperOne.

Anthropology and Philosophy
Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures.* Basic Books.
Eliade, M. (1959). *The Sacred and the Profane.* Harcourt.
Campbell, J. (1949). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.* Princeton University Press.

Foucault, M. (1972). *The Archaeology of Knowledge.* Pantheon.
Turner, V. (1969). *The Ritual Process.* Aldine.

Comparative Religion

Izutsu, T. (1964). *God and Man in the Qur'an.* Keio University Press.
Murata, S., & Chittick, W. C. (1994). *The Vision of Islam.* Paragon House.
Smith, H. (1991). *The World's Religions.* HarperCollins.
Keown, D. (1996). *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford University Press.